16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

792 A very complex representation would seem to be involved here, in which ideas about persons and ideas about Spirit are mixed together with regard to a man who in one way of thinking about him is man and in another way of thinking about him is Spirit and who is also conceived of as both man and Spirit.

792 As explained in Chapter II, the chief function of such prophets as gained any considerable following and became political figures 787 was their hermeneutic role in warfare. They spoke the directions of the spirits of the air for raids on the Dinka[1] and for resistance to the slavers and the administration and made sacrifices to them. Their other functions were subsidiary and were exercised by lesser [155] prophets also: healing, particularly curing barrenness of women, staying of epidemics lethal to men or cattle, and exorcism of troublesome spirits. They were also credited with power to foretell events and with a more than usual insight (*gwic*). A prophet heals people by rubbing his spittle on them or by sprinkling them with water, milk, or butter, and his inspiration gives him foreknowledge, but he, like anyone else, relies on sacrifice in times of trouble; and he may be asked to sacrifice for any purpose except on those occasions reserved to the priesthood. People ask him to sacrifice on their behalf, not because they cannot make sacrifice themselves, but because sacrifice by him is felt to have special efficacy in that he has a special and intimate association with Spirit. Nevertheless, though prophets, like priests, may sacrifice on behalf of other people, the distinctive character of the prophet is not, as it is of the priest, his sacrificial role, but his revelational role deriving from spiritual inspiration. Hence, so I have been told, women, as well as men, may become minor prophets, though I believe only an old, and possibly barren, woman, of whom Nuer say *'cos wut'*, 'she has become a man', would do so. A female prophet would not sacrifice.

792 I mentioned briefly, because I have treated the matter elsewhere, •668 the political significance of the Nuer priests, their office being a politico-religious institution of the traditional social order. The prophets can also be regarded from the same point of view, as a politico-religious institution which has recently emerged in answer to changes in the social order. It may be hard to believe that people with prophetic powers have not always existed among the Nuer, but there is no evidence that they have; and all Nuer with whom

[1] They acquired substantial herds from their share of the booty.

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
FJ22 Nuer FJ22

PRIESTS AND PROPHETS

I have discussed the question stated that in old days, before *deng*, the first of the air-spirits to fall to earth, entered into men towards the end of last century there were no prophets at all, only the *kuar*, the priests. I have suggested in an earlier book that their appearance might be explained by historical events—the expansion of the Nuer and, more particularly, the threat to their independence by northern Arab slavers, the Mahdists, and Anglo-Egyptian rule, which required, if it were to be met, greater political unity and the development of political authority. This view accords also with what has been said in general about the relation of Nuer religious conceptions to their social structure. It is possible that some of the prophets might have established political authority and leadership overriding local loyalties and sectional interests had they been allowed to, for prophetic powers tend to become hereditary, passing to whichever son is susceptible. Thus the mantle of Ngundeng fell upon his son Gwek, who was more a political, and less a religious, figure than his father had been; and the mantle of Deng Leaka fell upon his son Dwal. The Government effectively stopped development in this direction. Direct British administration was instituted, and no more influential prophets emerged. On the other hand, far from the idea of spirits—airspirits, totemic and totemistic spirits, nature sprites, and fetish spirits—dwelling among men having been eclipsed it has spread more widely and in ever-increasing variety. This was already beginning to happen when I was in Nuerland (in the years 1930, 1931, 1935, and 1936), but the Nuer of the areas in which I carried out most of my research, the Lou and eastern Jikany tribes, had heard of only a few of the many spirits already familiar to those to the west of the Nile. So strongly have they now invaded these territories that, Dr. Lienhardt tells me, they have established themselves among the Anuak, who live yet farther to the east and had no knowledge of them as late as 1940. If my interpretation of the emergence and proliferation of new religious conceptions in terms of structure and structural developments is correct it would follow that we have here a counterpart in religious thought to an increasing fragmentation and individualization amounting by this time to a breakdown of the traditional social order.

Historical circumstances have brought the Nuer into closer communication at all points with foreign ideas; and the breakdown of their traditional way of life and the taking over of some